

National School Safety Policy Alignment with Risk Management Practices in Secondary Schools Environment in Kericho County, Kenya

Dorine Chepngeno

Masters' Student, Department of Educational Foundations,
Kenyatta University, Kenya

Peter Mugo Gathara

Department of Educational Foundations,
Kenyatta University, Kenya

Violet Wawire

Department of Educational Foundations,
Kenyatta University, Kenya

Abstract:- Ensuring school safety is of paramount importance in creating a conducive learning environment. Governments around the world have implemented policies and programs to promote school safety. This study purposed to investigate whether secondary schools observe the risk management practices in school environment as indicated in the national school safety policy document in Bureti Sub-County, Kericho County, Kenya. This study employed Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of Needs theory (1943) and General Systems Theory by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968). This study used a descriptive survey design. The sample comprised of 7 secondary schools, 7 principals, 20 teachers, 1 education officer and 180 learners. Questionnaires, interviews and observation checklists were utilized as data collection tools. Data was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Findings revealed that most practices in learning environment do not align with requirements in the school safety standards manual. The findings also indicated that schools should improve their physical and social environment. School infrastructures should be built to the required standards so as to create conducive learning environment. Schools should explore avenues to generate their own resources to improve on the safety status. Safe and secure school environment facilitates increased learner enrolment, retention and completion rates hence high achievement and quality education. In conclusion, prioritizing the safety of learners and staff is essential for fostering a comfortable learning atmosphere.

Keywords:- School Safety, Safe School Environment, Safety Standards Manual, Alignment.

I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, safety of learners is an educational policy concern which has become a key factor in the countries bid to achieve provision of quality education. Education is regarded as basic human right that is important for a nation's overall development, as a social vaccine in the fight against poverty and social mobility (UNESCO, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established by the UN General Assembly in 2015, include a focus on education in SDG 4. Specifically, Target 4a emphasizes the need to construct and upgrade educational facilities that cater to the needs of all individuals, including children, adults, and those with disabilities, while ensuring a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning atmosphere. Schools have a crucial role in managing risks effectively within educational settings to enhance student enrollment, retention, and completion rates. SDG 4 highlights the responsibility of schools to effectively manage risks in order to boost student enrollment and retention. Continents have crafted plans to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with Africa's Agenda 2063 being a notable example. Adopted in January 2015, this strategic framework aims for the socio-economic transformation of Africa over a 50-year period, from 2013 to 2063 (African Union, 2016). A key focus of this agenda is to ensure that all African children have access to quality education in safe environments. This includes initiatives to enhance school infrastructure, implement child protection policies, and provide training on disaster preparedness and response.

Various countries have established policies and implemented procedures to ensure learner safety. A series of school shootings in the United States of America prompted the US government to provide a framework for schools to use in order to reduce cases of insecurity. A publication, aimed at improving police profession, by the International Association of Chiefs of Police provided a guidebook for preventing and responding to school violence, describes mitigation strategies for making schools safe.

The Indian government has also worked towards avoiding incidents that endanger learners by creating school safety program that aims at establishing a safe school culture by educating both learners and the school community about disaster preparedness (Gupta & Yadav, 2023).

The Kenyan constitution (2010) requires parents and guardians to be vigilant against any form of child abuse for it is a crime to discriminate a child (Musiega, 2021). The school and educational institutions in general should guarantee that school surroundings are adaptive for all children, including those with special needs.

In 2008, the Ministry of Education and Church World Service (CWS) collaborated to create the Safety Standards Manual (SSM), which is now implemented in all Kenyan schools. The manual aims to guarantee a secure social environment for learners, as there have been several reports of unsafe situations in schools. If safety and security concerns are not effectively addressed, the Kenyan government's devotion to promoting access, equity, participation, retention, completion, and quality of education is certainly to be affected. Safe environments in schools fosters quality teaching and learning and improves levels of interactions amongst peers and between a learner and a teacher while insecure school environments increase levels of truancy and absenteeism especially to girls who are most vulnerable. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that the learners and school environments are protected by ensuring that safety standards are implemented and followed by schools so as to achieve quality education.

➤ Objectives

The study sought to;

- To establish trends in the awareness levels of school safety policies among stakeholders in secondary schools in Bureti Sub County, Kericho County, Kenya.
- To analyze the psychosocial safety practices in school environment and alignment with national school safety policies requirements in secondary schools in Bureti Sub County, Kericho County, Kenya.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A. Awareness Levels of School Safety Policies among Stakeholders

China frequently experiences severe earthquakes, resulting in numerous casualties, including students, due to inadequate safety measures and disaster preparedness. This highlights a global issue of school safety, noting that many individuals in China lacked awareness of safety practices, even with organized safety drills in place. The current study aimed to assess the awareness and training of stakeholders in schools in Bureti Sub-County regarding safety procedures for handling emergencies and calamities.

In the Philippines, the average of 20 annual typhoons necessitated the establishment of School Disaster Risk Reduction and Management teams to ensure student safety. Uganda has implemented the Safe School Contract

guidelines, promoting stakeholder involvement in health and safety, emphasizing the responsibility of school managers.

Udali's (2020) study in Trans-Nzoia County revealed that teachers, students, and security personnel had a low awareness of school safety protocols, with most not participating in security drills or having access to the Ministry of Education's safety manual. This lack of preparation indicated a broader issue, as people cannot act on what they do not know. In contrast, the current study examines both private and public secondary schools to compare safety policy awareness among stakeholders. Similarly, Ng'ang'a's (2013) research in Nyeri Central district found that staff were unaware of safety standards and recommended increased training on using safety equipment. Most students reported not receiving training on safety and first aid, highlighting a gap in preparedness. This study builds on Ng'ang'a's findings by exploring the state of safety training in Bureti sub-county, Kericho County.

B. Psychosocial Safety Practices in School Environment and Alignment with National School Safety Policies Requirements

The implementation of supportive infrastructure, such as CCTV cameras, significantly enhances student safety in schools. Galligan et al. (2020) in their study in US highlight the importance of surveillance in public school safety, yet most Kenyan secondary schools lack such equipment, particularly in Bureti Sub-County. The presence of CCTV can help children feel more secure, deterring potential threats like sexual molestation in boarding schools. The current study addresses the gap in research regarding the availability and effectiveness of these safety measures in Bureti. A study by Nshekenabo (2018) in Tanzania identified drug and substance misuse as a significant threat to student safety in secondary schools, leading to mental impairment, health issues, and violence. This present study investigates how schools in Kericho County address drug-related challenges and the effectiveness of guidance and counselling sessions in mitigating these issues. Similarly, Apio (2018) found that domestic violence (DV) negatively affects children's academic performance in Uganda, causing absenteeism, poor grades, and mental health issues. The current research aims to assess whether implementing safety policies in Kenyan schools helps protect students from the impacts of domestic violence. Interpersonal relationships within the school community are crucial for creating a safe social environment, yet bullying among students, particularly against newcomers, poses a significant threat in Kenyan schools. Kvarme et al. (2020) highlight that guidelines implemented since 2018 aim to combat bullying and enhance school quality, emphasizing the need for teachers to intervene and foster a secure learning atmosphere. Additionally, parents are encouraged to strengthen their relationships with their children at home. The Ministry of Education's 2008 guidelines stress the importance of involving the local community and recognizing diverse learning styles beyond just academic performance. The current study in Bureti Sub-County seeks feedback on safety measures to enhance the instructional quality in secondary schools.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study employed Descriptive Survey design to collect factual information describing national school safety policy alignment with practices in secondary school environment. Descriptive research design is utilized to acquire information on current issues (Kothari, 2017). A survey method was appropriate in this study since the researcher wished to establish information that describes current state of a phenomenon in this situation: status of school safety in the study locale. Stratified random sampling was used to select seven secondary schools from two strata, public and private, resulting in the random selection of four public and three private schools after their names were written, folded, and shuffled. Purposive sampling was employed to select a Sub-County Education Officer and principals from the chosen schools for their potential to provide valuable information for the study. Simple random sampling was utilized to select learners and teachers from the chosen schools, ensuring that each individual had an equal chance of being included based on their school affiliation. The target population of this study were 61 secondary schools, 61 principals, 470 teachers, 1800 learners and 6 Education Officers in Kericho County. The sample size comprised of 7 secondary schools, 7 principals, 20 teachers, 1 education officer and 180 learners. Questionnaires for students and teachers, interview schedules for principals and education officer and an

observation checklist are the research instruments that were used to collect data. Data was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively then presented in tables, graphs, frequencies, percentages and verbatim.

IV. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

A. Stakeholders' Awareness Levels on the Safety Policy

To establish this, information was solicited from the questionnaire that was administered to the learners, teachers and an interview schedule with the principal and the sub-county education officer. All the teachers and principals and 148(86%) learners said they are aware of the school safety policies while only 24(16%) learners said they are unaware. When teachers were asked how they got to know the policies 11(55%) were through the circular while 9(45%) through training from the MOE (67%), seminars and workshops (93%), public health officials and Red Cross (52%). These findings on safety awareness levels disagree with Ng'anga's (2013) and Udali (2020) studies which found that most stakeholders in schools were unaware with many not participating in drills and ignorant of safety contents. It can therefore, be deduced that averagely, schools are yet to comply with the requirement of availing stakeholders with knowledge and that they are able to handle unsafe situations in schools. Table 1 presents a comprehensive analysis of the same.

Table 1 Stakeholders' Awareness Levels of School Safety Policy

Respondents	Aware (f)	Aware (%)	Unaware (f)	Unaware (%)
Teachers	20	100	-	-
Learners	148	86	24	14
Principals	7	100	-	-

Source: Chepngeno, Wawire and Gathara, (2024)

Through an interview schedule with an education officer, the researcher attempted to establish their awareness levels and how they contribute in creating awareness of the school safety policy to the school community and stakeholders. The education officer pointed out that this safety measures should be put in practice in schools to allow learners concentrate when learning. Upon further probing on the safety policy documents, they know and the tasks they perform to create awareness on school safety policy guidelines, the education officer made the following statement:

...generally, I know there are many school safety policy documents that the government has provided. One is the Kenyan 2010 Constitution which provides protection against any form of child abuse, Basic Education Act of 2013 which requires schools to maintain safety regulations and building standards and the Safety Standards Manual for Schools. We have always had a routine throughout the year on school going days where we visit schools and train them on safety measures like how to use fire extinguishers, conducting first aids, using emergency doors and exits. Unfortunately, cases

of unsafe conditions are still experienced in schools. (Education Officer, A)

The officer's statement indicate that the administrators recognize their duty to inform all relevant school stakeholders about safety practices and measures to ensure preparedness for any risks or emergencies.

B. Psychosocial safety practices in school environment and alignment with the school safety policy requirements

Information in regard to guidance and counselling, child abuse, harassment, bullying and discrimination was sought. From the findings, 6 (86%) of the principals, 19 (95%) of the teachers and 158 (92%) of students agreed that the learners are given guidance and counselling sessions to deal with Alcohol, Drugs and Abuse cases for learners in order to promote safety in schools. However, 1 (14%) principal, 1 (5%) teacher and 14 (8%) of the students disagreed. Majority of the principals 66% agreed that the sessions had a positive impact while 34% disagreed. According to the Safety Standards Manual (2008), schools should educate learners on the dangers of drug use and abuse.

From the researcher's observation guide, only 5(71%) of which 42% was made up of private and 29% public schools from the sample had adhered to this requirement, by the Safety Standards Manual, of having DRUG FREE ZONE posters in school while 2(29%) which were all public schools had not adhered to it. This means that learners and staff are always reminded to stay away from drugs and to potential offenders that the school takes drug-related issues seriously. In a school which had this drug free zone poster, one of the principals made the following statement concerning its impact;

These posters play a vital role in supporting learners' well-being, they act as a preventive measure by constantly

reminding them of the school's commitment to promoting positive behaviors and against drug use in schools. But, if students are unwilling to alter their behavior, posters will be useless (Principal School D).

These sentiment from the principal implies that a Drug Free Zone poster in a school environment helps to raise awareness on the importance of promoting a drug-free learning space and so it is an individual role to choose to adhere to the message it passes across. The finding agrees with a study by Nshekenabo (2018) in Tanzania which highlighted that drug and substance misuse poses a major risk to student safety in secondary schools, resulting in mental impairment, health problems, and violence.



Fig 1: An example of a Drug Free Zone poster in one of the schools
Source: Chepogeno, Wawire and Gathara, (2024)

Concerning bullying, domestic violence, harassment and discrimination cases in schools, majority of teachers (80%), 56% were from private secondary schools while 24% from public, noted that these cases do not exist while only

(20%) of the teachers, all from public schools, agreed that such cases exist. This implied that the psychosocial safety practice in majorly public schools is still not adhered to. Figure 2 summarizes the findings:

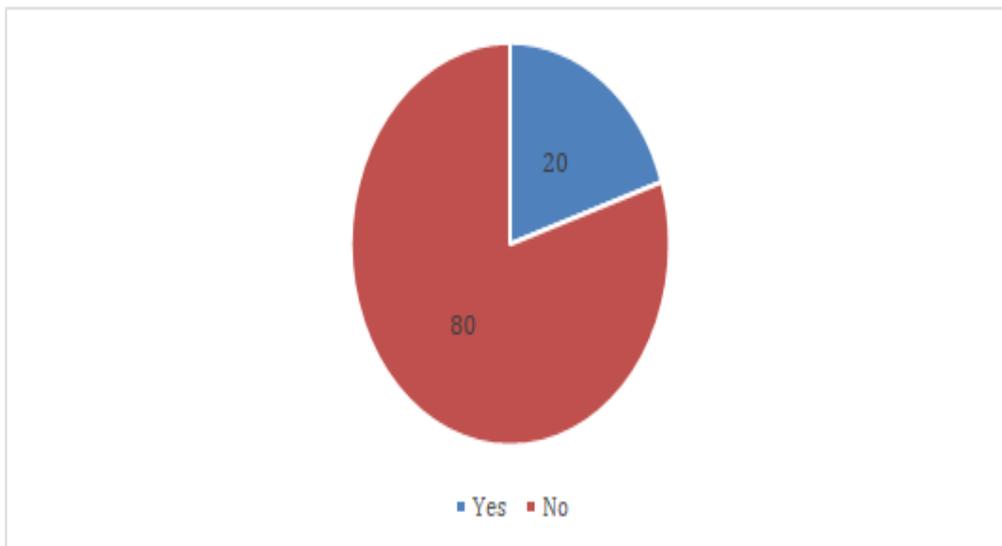


Fig 2: Pie Chart showing Teachers' Responses on whether there are Bullying, Domestic Violence, Harassment and Discrimination Cases in school.

Source: Chepngeno, Wawire and Gathara (2024)

The guidelines in the SSM (2008) instructs teachers to take action against bullies, harassers and discriminators as they can cause isolation, hopelessness, anxiety and low self-esteem. Upon further probing of whether the teachers have attended any seminar or workshop on ways of dealing with cases of bullying, harassment and discrimination in schools, only 1(5%) female teacher in a public secondary school agreed while 19(95%), 40% females and 55% males, disagreed to the assertion. This indicates that most teachers did not attend the training sessions, contrary to SSM guidelines, which mandate that staff participate in training on identifying and addressing harassment, bullying, and discrimination in schools. The training should also cover listening skills, behaviour management, and handling emerging issues.

Learners were asked if they had experienced any form of child or sexual abuse, with 34% confirming they had and 66% stating they had not. This suggests that a significant number of children remain safe from such abuse. However, it's important to note that the effects of this abuse can persist into adulthood and potentially impact their development.

The principals were further interviewed on bullying cases the school had experienced and how they addressed it and one of them made the following statement:

... the rate of bullying cases in our school is minimal, this is because we have sensitized the students on the need to show kindness and respect to one another and assuring them that the school do not tolerate bullying. It has occurred in the past and we managed to handle it by encouraging students to report those incidents, taking the report seriously and doing prompt investigation, we organized peer mentoring and counselling programs, provided support to the victim and disciplinary actions to the bully (Principal, School F).

The statement from the principal of school F showed that cases of bullying are taken seriously as they may cause physical and psychological harm. The result concurs with the findings by Apio (2018) study that these forms of violence affect learner's academic achievements.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study reveal significant gaps in awareness and adherence to safety policies within schools in Bureti Sub-County. While a majority of teachers and principals report awareness of school safety policies, many learners remain uninformed, indicating a need for improved communication and training efforts. Despite the implementation of guidance and counseling sessions aimed at addressing issues like substance abuse, the actual adherence to safety measures, such as the display of Drug Free Zone posters, is inconsistent among schools. Moreover, the lack of reported incidents of bullying, harassment, and domestic violence suggests either a denial of these issues or a failure to adequately address them, particularly in public schools. The low attendance at training sessions for teachers further underscores the need for enhanced professional development to equip staff with the necessary skills to handle safety concerns effectively. Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of creating a comprehensive safety culture that involves all stakeholders, ensuring that safety policies are not only known but actively practiced in the school environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improved communication is essential, with regular workshops and informational sessions designed to keep students, parents, and staff informed about safety policies. Conducting periodic assessments of safety practices will help identify areas needing improvement, utilizing surveys

and focus groups for comprehensive feedback. Additionally, supportive infrastructure, such as Drug Free Zone posters and CCTV cameras, should be prioritized to enhance security and raise awareness. Strengthening guidance and counselling services is vital, addressing issues like substance abuse and bullying to provide necessary support for students. Comprehensive training programs should be implemented for teachers and staff to help them recognize and manage bullying, harassment, and discrimination. Engaging parents and the broader community in safety initiatives can foster collaboration and strengthen school safety. Finally, strict adherence to the Safety Standards Manual is crucial, with ongoing training for staff on their safety responsibilities. Implementing these recommendations can significantly improve the safety and supportiveness of the learning environment for all learners.

REFERENCES

- [1]. African Union. (2016). Africa health strategy 2016–2030. *Addis Ababa: African Union*.
- [2]. Apio, I. (2018). Domestic violence and children's academic performance in Uganda; a case study of Buwenge Town Council, Kagoma Constituency, Jinja District, Eastern Uganda.
- [3]. Galligan, C., Rosenfeld, H., Kleinman, M., & Parthasarathy, S. (2020). *Cameras in the classroom: Facial recognition technology in schools*.
- [4]. Gupta, O. J., & Yadav, S. (2023). Determinants in advancement of teaching and learning in higher education: In special reference to management education. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 21(2), 100823.
- [5]. Kothari, C. (2017). Research methodology methods and techniques by CR Kothari. *Published by New Age International (P) Ltd., Publishers, 91*.
- [6]. Kvarme, L. G., Misvær, N., Valla, L., Myhre, M. C., Holen, S., & Sagatun, Å. (2020). Bullying in school: Importance of and challenges involved in talking to the school nurse. *The Journal of School Nursing*, 36(6), 451-457.
- [7]. Musiega, R. (2021). *Enhancing Child Justice in Kenya: An Appraisal of the Implementation of the Rights of Child Offenders* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).
- [8]. Nshakenabo, F. (2018). *Impact of drug abuse on secondary school students' academic achievement in Tanzania: the case of Temeke municipality* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Dodoma).
- [9]. Udali, A. J. (2020). Learners and staff awareness on school safety measures in public boarding secondary schools in Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 7(12).
- [10]. UNESCO (2015). *Rethinking education: Towards a common global good? Paris: UNESCO*